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People wearing protective face masks walk outside a Christmas decorated coffee shop in Psiri district of Athens, on Monday, Dec 27, 2021.

Associated Press
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Omicron spreads global gloom over New Year's celebrations

From Front

By **RAF CASERT**
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — As omicron spreads ever more gloom around the globe ahead of New Year's Eve, governments are moving at different speeds to contain the scourge, with some reimposing restrictions immediately and others hesitating to spoil the party again.

In Britain, where the highly contagious variant of the coronavirus has sent case-loads soaring to record highs, Health Secretary Sajid Javid said Monday no further restrictions will be introduced in England before the new year. New daily infections in England are hovering around 100,000, and hospital admissions were up more than 70% on Christmas from a week earlier.

"When we get into the new year, of course, we will see then if we do need to take any further measures, but nothing more until then, at least," Javid said.

Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, though, nightclubs have been ordered closed and limits on gatherings imposed in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, leaving the country divided in its approach to the crisis.

The Netherlands, meanwhile, has already shut down all nonessential stores, restaurants and bars and extended the school holidays in what largely amounts to a new lockdown. In Belgium, new measures went into effect Monday and over the weekend: Shopping in large groups was banned, and movie theaters and concert halls closed in the middle of the holiday season.



Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease expert, wears a face mask as he arrives for the the White House COVID-19 Response Team's regular call with the National Governors Association in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House Campus, Monday, Dec. 27, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

In France, Prime Minister Jean Castex announced a set of restrictions set to kick in next week, after New Year's. Among them: Big events will be limited to 2,000 people indoors and 5,000 outdoors; eating and drinking will be banned in theaters, at sports venues and on public transportation; and working from home will be mandatory at least three days a week for employees whose jobs make it possible.

Also, a bill will be voted on in France next month to create a vaccine pass that will allow only inoculated people to enter public places, including restaurants, bars and movie theaters.

The measures come after France recorded more than 100,000 COVID-19 infections in a single day for the first time in the pandemic.

In the U.S., the Biden administration has strongly emphasized the importance of vaccinations, boosters

and rapid testing, while New York City's sweeping mandate requiring nearly all businesses, big and small, to bar unvaccinated employees from the workplace took effect Monday. It was announced three weeks ago, soon after omicron gained a foothold in the U.S.

The top U.S. infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, warned that with omicron, "it's going to get worse before it gets better," and he said authorities should seriously consider requiring that domestic airline passengers be vaccinated. "When you make vaccination a requirement, that's another incentive to get more people vaccinated," Fauci told MSNBC.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday cut isolation restrictions for people who have the virus, saying it's in line with the science of when people are most infectious and could also

help industries continue to function as cases surge.

"We want to make sure there is a mechanism by which we can safely continue to keep society functioning while following the science," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky told The Associated Press.

Omicron has forced thousands of flight cancellations and delays around the globe because of staffing shortages linked to the virus, scrambling travelers' holiday plans.

FlightAware, a flight-tracking website, counted more than 2,700 cancellations worldwide by Monday evening in Europe — about 1,100 of them within, into or out of the U.S.

Despite the variant's extraordinary ability to infect people, early indications are that it might cause milder illness than previous versions. That uncertainty is keeping governments guessing and resulting in widely varying strategies for

beating back the surge.

In Greece, authorities announced additional restrictions — also effective after New Year's — after recording its highest-ever one-day total of new infections, nearly 9,300.

Health Minister Thanos Plevris said that starting Jan. 3, high-protection or double masks will be mandatory at supermarkets and on public transportation; entertainment venues will close at midnight, and capacity will be cut to 10% at soccer stadiums, among other measures.

In Poland, a nation of 38 million where the daily death toll now often tops 500, now-closed nightclubs will be allowed to reopen on New Year's Eve, with the government unwilling to go against the will of the many voters opposed to restrictions and mandatory vaccinations.

And despite the highest death toll from COVID-19 in Europe, Russia will ring in the new year with little if any restrictions. Many precautions will be lifted during the holiday period that runs for 10 days starting New Year's Eve. Russia also will not impose any additional travel curbs.

The official Rosstat statistical agency estimated that between April 2020 and October 2021, Russia had 537,000 virus-related deaths.

In Belgium, the move to close theaters and arts centers came in for especially heavy criticism.

"We need it also for our mental health. It is the only way for people to live experiences, to tell stories. It is of paramount importance for us to be open in these complicated and complex times," said Michael De Kok, artistic director of the Flemish Royal Theatre. □

CDC recommends shorter COVID isolation, quarantine for all

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. health officials on Monday cut isolation restrictions for Americans who catch the coronavirus from 10 to five days, and similarly shortened the time that close contacts need to quarantine. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials said the guidance is in keeping with growing evidence that people with the coronavirus are most infectious in the two days before and three days after symptoms develop. The decision also was driven by a recent surge in COVID-19 cases, propelled by the omicron variant.

Early research suggests omicron may cause milder illnesses than earlier versions of the coronavirus. But the sheer number of people becoming infected — and therefore having to isolate or quarantine — threatens to crush the ability of hospitals, airlines and other businesses to stay open, experts say.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said the country is about to see a lot of omicron cases.

“Not all of those cases are going to be severe. In fact many are going to be as-



A middle school principal walks the empty halls of his school as he speaks with one of his teachers to get an update on her COVID-19 symptoms, Friday, Aug., 20, 2021, in Wrightsville, Ga.

Associated Press

ymptomatic,” she told The Associated Press on Monday. “We want to make sure there is a mechanism by which we can safely continue to keep society functioning while following the science.”

Last week, the agency loosened rules that previously called on health care workers to stay out of work for 10 days if they test positive. The new recommendations said workers could go back to work after sev-

en days if they test negative and don't have symptoms. And the agency said isolation time could be cut to five days, or even fewer, if there are severe staffing shortages. Now, the CDC is changing the isolation and quarantine guidance for the general public to be even less stringent.

The guidance is not a mandate; it's a recommendation to employers and state and local officials. Last week, New York state said

it would expand on the CDC's guidance for health-care workers to include employees who have other critical jobs that are facing a severe staffing shortage. It's possible other states will seek to shorten their isolation and quarantine policies, and CDC is trying to get out ahead of the shift. “It would be helpful to have uniform CDC guidance” that others could draw from, rather than a mish-mash of policies, Walensky

said. The CDC's guidance on isolation and quarantine has seemed confusing to the public, and the new recommendations are “happening at a time when more people are testing positive for the first time and looking for guidance,” said Lindsay Wiley, an American University public health law expert. Nevertheless, the guidance continues to be complex.

ISOLATION

The isolation rules are for people who are infected. They are the same for people who are unvaccinated, partly vaccinated, fully vaccinated or boosted.

They say:

—The clock starts the day you test positive.

—An infected person should go into isolations for five days, instead of the previously recommended 10.

—At the end of five days, if you have no symptoms, you can return to normal activities but must wear a mask everywhere — even at home around others — for at least five more days.

—If you still have symptoms after isolating for five days, stay home until you feel better and then start your five days of wearing a mask at all times. □

Officials: Nearly 25% of Navy warship crew has COVID-19

By LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — About two dozen sailors on a U.S. Navy warship — or roughly 25% of the crew — have now tested positive for COVID-19, keeping the ship sidelined in port at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay in Cuba Monday, according to U.S. defense officials.

The USS Milwaukee has a crew of a bit more than 100, and it was forced to pause its deployment late last week because of the coronavirus outbreak. The defense officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the outbreak, said the number of infected sailors is staying relatively constant at this point.

The USS Milwaukee, a smaller, stealthier combat ship, is the first Navy ship this year to have to interrupt its deployment at sea.

It began its deployment from Naval Station Mayport in Jacksonville, Florida, on Dec. 14, and had stopped for a scheduled port visit. The ship was heading into the U.S. Southern Command region.

Another warship, meanwhile, had to postpone its movement out to sea earlier this month due to a separate outbreak.

Navy Cmdr. Sean Robertson, spokesman for 3rd Fleet, said the USS Halsey, a destroyer, delayed its homeport move from Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, to San Diego because a significant number of the crew became infected with COVID-19. The ship was finally able to leave Hawaii on Sunday. The move is not a deployment, but a transfer to a new home station for the crew.

A Navy official said roughly one-third of the Halsey crew tested positive for the virus, and most had only mild symptoms or none

at all. A destroyer has about 300 crew members. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details on the crew impact. Robertson said the crew was nearly 100% vaccinated and no one was taken to the hospital. Vaccine booster shots were made available for the crew. Robertson also said some of the samples have been tested and all were the omicron variant.

The Navy said in a statement Friday that the USS Milwaukee's crew was “100% immunized” and that all of those who tested positive for COVID-19 were being isolated on the ship away from other crew members.

The U.S. officials said Monday that the Navy believes the total vaccination of the crew is the key factor in controlling the outbreak.

According to the Navy's statement, “a portion” of those infected are having mild symptoms,

and the specific variant is not yet known. COVID-19 cases have surged across the country as a result of the highly contagious omicron variant.

Other Navy ships were sidelined during the early months of the virus outbreak last year.

The first major military outbreak of the virus happened early last year on a Navy warship, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, an aircraft carrier that was operating in the Pacific. The Roosevelt was sidelined in Guam for nearly two months, and more than 1,000 of the 4,800 crew members tested positive. One sailor died, and the entire crew went through weeks of quarantine in a rotation that kept enough sailors on the ship to keep it safe and running.

According to the latest data released by the Navy, more than 98% of all active-duty sailors have been fully vaccinated. □

Snow blasts California and freezes Pacific Northwest

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) —

Blowing snow in mountains of Northern California and Nevada closed key highways, while an arctic blast brought frigid temperatures to the Pacific Northwest and unusually warm weather settled over parts of Texas and the Southeast. At Donner Pass in the Sierra, officials with the University of California, Berkeley's Central Sierra Snow Laboratory on Monday said recent snowfall has smashed the snowiest December record of 179 inches (4.6 meters), set in 1970. The record is now 193.7 inches (4.9 meters) as more snow is expected.

The Northstar California Resort in Truckee closed its mountain operations on Monday amid blizzard conditions. The ski resort has received more than 6 feet (1.8 meters) of snow over the last 48 hours, according to the resort's Facebook post.

Search and rescue crews are looking for a missing skier who was last seen Saturday morning on a lift at the ski resort, KCRA reported. The snowpack in the Sierra was at dangerously low levels after recent weeks of dry weather but the state Department of Water Resources reported on Monday that the snowpack was between 145% and 161% of normal across the range with more snow expected. In the Pacific Northwest, emergency warming shel-



A vehicle sits stuck in the snow along Brunswick Road and Sutton Way Monday morning, Dec. 27, 2021, in Grass Valley, Calif.

Associated Press

ters were opened throughout western Washington and Oregon as temperatures plunged into the teens and forecasters said an arctic blast would last for several days. Sunday's snow showers blew into the Pacific Northwest from the Gulf of Alaska, dumping up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) across the Seattle area.

More than a foot (0.3 meters) was reported near Port Angeles across the Puget Sound on the Olympic Peninsula. Portland, Oregon, also received snowfall. Frigid temperatures in the region could tie or break records in the coming days. The National Weather Ser-

vice said Seattle's low Sunday was 20 degrees F (-6.7 C), breaking a mark set in 1948. Bellingham was 9 degrees F (-12.8 C), three degrees colder than the previous record set in 1971.

State officials in Oregon have declared an emergency. In Multnomah County — home to Portland — six severe weather shelters are open with plans to open additional sites, including at the Oregon Convention Center. Seattle city leaders also opened at least six severe weather shelters starting Saturday through at least Wednesday.

In Nevada, freezing air

and blinding snow blasted across the northern part of the state on Monday, affecting travel and business, closing Sierra Nevada highway passes, delaying airport flights and shutting state offices.

Interstate 80 remained closed due to poor visibility and heavy snow from the Nevada state line to Placer County, California. An avalanche blocked a state route that connects Tahoe City to some ski resorts in Olympic Valley and authorities urged motorists to avoid nonessential travel. Several flights were canceled or delayed at Reno-Tahoe International Airport

and at Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas, where skies were clear but nearby mountains were capped by snow.

Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak ordered nonessential state workers other than public safety and corrections personnel to remain home due to the storm.

Weather and travel advisories stretched to northeast Nevada and Elko due to the possibility of blowing and drifting snow.

The storms that have been pummeling California and Nevada in recent days also brought rain and snow to Arizona.

A record inch of rain in one day was reported at the airport in Phoenix Friday when 11 inches (28 centimeters) of snow fell at the Arizona Snowbowl ski resort just outside Flagstaff. Another 6 inches (15 centimeters) of snow were recorded in the 24 hours ending Monday morning.

Temperatures were unseasonably warm in parts of the Southern Plains, including in Arkansas, where several cities broke records on Christmas Day for daily high temperatures.

But forecasters warned that severe storms were possible midweek when a storm system moves through the Deep South, with Alabama and Mississippi at greatest risk for bad weather, according to the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma. □



A pile of rubble is all that is left after the removal of the pedestal that once held the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee on Monument Ave., Thursday Dec. 23, 2021, in Richmond, Va.

Associated Press

By SARAH RANKIN
Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Crews wrapping up the removal Monday of a giant pedestal that once

held a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Richmond found what appeared to be a second and long-sought-after time capsule, Virginia Gov.

Again, crews find apparent time capsule at Lee statue site

Ralph Northam said. The governor tweeted photos of a box being removed from the site and said conservators were studying the artifact. "They found it! This is likely the time capsule everyone was looking for," he tweeted. The governor said the box would not be opened Monday. It wasn't immediately clear what kind of condition any contents might be in. The development marked the latest turn in a months-long search for the capsule, which contempo-

aneous news accounts indicate was placed during a cornerstone-laying ceremony in 1887 attended by thousands of people. News accounts described its dozens of donated artifacts, including Confederate memorabilia. Based on historical records, some have also speculated the capsule might contain a rare photo of deceased President Abraham Lincoln. Earlier this month, crews dismantling the pedestal found a time capsule embedded in a granite block

that some initially thought might have been the one placed in 1887. But after state conservators spent hours last week gingerly prying the box open, they didn't find the expected trove of objects related to the Confederacy. Instead, conservators pulled out a few waterlogged books, a silver coin and an envelope with some papers. The prevailing theory last week was that the lead box was left by a person — or persons — who oversaw the monument's construction. □

Iran presses on oil exports as nuclear talks resume

By ALEX SCHULLER and GEIR MOULSON

Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Negotiators from Iran and five world powers resumed negotiations Monday on restoring Tehran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal, with Iran insisting that the United States and its allies promise to allow it to export its crude oil. The latest round of talks in Vienna, the eighth, opened 10 days after negotiations were adjourned for the Iranian negotiator to return home for consultations. The previous round, the first after a more than five-month gap caused by the arrival of a new hard-line government in Iran, was marked by tensions over new Iranian demands.

"If we work hard in the days and weeks ahead, we should have a positive result," Enrique Mora, the European Union diplomat who chaired the talks, said after the opening session. But "it's going to be very hard difficult political decisions have to be taken."

Tehran's landmark accord with world powers Britain, France, Germany, the U.S., Russia and China granted Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

But in 2018, then-President Donald Trump withdrew



Palais Coburg, where closed-door nuclear talks take place in Vienna, Austria, Dec. 17, 2021.

Associated Press

America from the deal and imposed sweeping sanctions on Iran, including against its oil sector the life-line of its economy. Iran's crude exports plummeted and international oil companies scrapped deals with Tehran, weakening its economy.

The other signatories struggled to keep alive the agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The United States is participating only indirectly in this year's talks to restore the deal, which President Joe Biden has signaled he wants to rejoin.

Speaking in Tehran ahead of the talks' resumption, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said Iran wants the upcoming round of talks to focus on its sanctions-hit oil industry. The aim is to get to the "point where Iranian oil is being sold easily and without any barriers and its money arrives in Iran's bank accounts," he said. Amirabdollahian said Iran wanted to "be able to enjoy full economic concessions under the nuclear deal." "Guarantee and verification (of the removal of sanctions) are among topics that we have focused on," he said.

The new administration of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has repeatedly demanded the removal of all economic sanctions before Iran reins in its nuclear advances.

Separately on Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said it would be "intolerable" for the West to demand anything from Tehran beyond compliance with the original deal. Iran has steadily abandoned all of the accord's limits since the American withdrawal and is now enriching uranium to 60% purity a short, technical step

from weapons-grade levels. It spins ever-more advanced centrifuges also barred by the deal.

Iran insists that its nuclear program is peaceful. But the country's significant nuclear steps have alarmed regional foes like Israel and world powers. Diplomats have warned that time is running out to restore the deal as Iran maintains a hard line in putting the onus on the U.S. to lift sanctions. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid of Israel, which fiercely opposed the 2015 deal, repeated his country's vow that Iran will never get a nuclear weapon.

"Certainly we prefer to act through international cooperation, but if necessary we will defend ourselves, by ourselves," he said, a veiled threat of unilateral military action against Iran's nuclear program.

Diplomats from the three European powers have said that time is running out for a successful conclusion to the talks.

And Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted after the resumption of the talks was announced that "we need to orient ourselves towards successful completion of the talks as soon as possible, preferably by the beginning of February." □

Thousands of cranes killed by bird flu in northern Israel

JERUSALEM (AP) — A bird flu outbreak in northern Israel has killed at least 5,200 migratory cranes and forced farmers to slaughter hundreds of thousands of chickens as authorities try to contain what they say is the deadliest wildlife disaster in the nation's history.

Uri Naveh, a senior scientist at the Israel Parks and Nature Authority, said the situation is not yet under control.

"Many of the birds are dead in the middle of the water body so it's difficult for them to be taken out," he said Monday.

Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg called the crisis "the most serious damage to wildlife

in the history of the country."

"The extent of the damage is still unclear," she tweeted.

Yaron Michaeli, spokesman for the Hula Lake park, where the crane population is centered, said workers were removing the carcasses as quickly as possible, fearing they could infect other wildlife.

Dafna Yurista, spokeswoman for the Agriculture Ministry, said half a million chickens in the area were being slaughtered to prevent the disease from spreading.

About 500,000 cranes pass through Israel each year on the way to Africa and a small number stay behind, Michaeli said. This year, an

estimated 30,000 cranes stayed in Israel for the winter.

Michaeli said it is believed that the cranes were infected by smaller birds that had contact with farms suffering from outbreaks.

Israeli media carried photos of workers in white hazmat suits collecting crane carcasses after the birds were first found to be sick about 10 days ago.

Michaeli said the death toll among cranes appears to have stabilized in recent days.

"This is a good sign," he said. "They might be starting to get over this. We hope very much."

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's office said officials



A dead crane lies on the ground at the Hula Lake conservation area in northern Israel, Saturday, Dec. 25, 2021.

Associated Press

from the agriculture, environment and health ministries were monitoring the situation. There was no immediate information about infections among people, it

said. The cleanup is going more slowly than expected. "We are trying to see if there's any other solutions," Naveh said. □

Changes to Belarusian Constitution may extend leader's rule

By YURAS KARMANAU

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Belarus' authorities on Monday released a draft document proposing amendments to the country's constitution that may allow authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko to further cement his grip on power after months of mass protests and remain in office until 2035. The proposed amendments are published on the president's official website and the website of the state news agency Belta, and Belarusians are encouraged to submit their comments, suggestions and opinions about the changes.

The amendments bring back limits on presidential terms that had been abolished during Lukashenko's tenure, allowing a president only two five-year terms in office. The restriction, however, will only take effect once a "newly elected president" assumes office, which gives Lukashenko an opportunity to run for two more terms after his current term expires in 2025.

"Lukashenko opened a path to the presidency for himself until at least 2035, when he will be 81 years



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko attends a meeting with top level military officials in Minsk, Belarus, on Nov. 22, 2021.

Associated Press

old," independent political analyst Valery Karbalevich told The Associated Press. Other changes to the constitution include extending the parliament's term from four years to five, introducing the All-Belarus People's Assembly as a new body to operate in parallel with the parliament and granting former presidents immunity from prosecution over actions they took while in office. The amendments will be up for a referendum,

scheduled for February 2022. They will be considered approved if more than 50% vote for them, with a turnout threshold at 50%. During his 27 years leading the former Soviet republic with an iron fist, Lukashenko has held three referendums, abolishing limits on presidential terms, amending the constitution and bringing back Soviet-looking state symbols. Belarus was rocked by months of unprecedented

mass protests after Lukashenko was awarded a sixth consecutive term in office in the August 2020 presidential vote, which the opposition and the West denounced as a sham. He responded to the demonstrations with a brutal crackdown that saw more than 35,000 people arrested, thousands beaten by police and many forced to seek refuge abroad. The proposed constitutional changes were being

drafted during the turmoil, when Lukashenko realized "that he lost the support of the majority of the country's urban population," Karbalevich pointed out. The new governing body the All-Belarus People's Assembly was designed as a backup plan for the authoritarian leader if he is forced to step down as president, the analyst said.

According to the proposed amendments, a sitting president automatically becomes a delegate of the 1,200-seat Assembly and may chair it, if elected by other delegates.

The new proposed body is expected to meet at least once a year and will be empowered to set policy directives, draft laws, suggest constitutional changes, elect members of the country's Central Election Commission and judges of the country's highest courts.

The Assembly can also green-light deploying Belarusian troops abroad if proposed by the president, and oust the president if the leader is found to be in violation of the constitution or to have committed high treason or another major crime. □



In this photo released by the Russian Foreign Ministry Press Service, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pauses during his and Brazilian Foreign Minister Carlos Franca's joint news conference following their talks in Moscow, Russia, Nov. 30, 2021.

Associated Press

By DASHA LITVINOVA

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Talks between Russia and the United States on Moscow's demand for Western guarantees precluding NATO's expansion to Ukraine will

start immediately after the new year holiday period, Russia's top diplomat announced Monday. "It is with the U.S. that we will carry out the main work of negotiations, which will take place immediately

Russian FM: Security talks with US to start after holidays

after the new year holidays end," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview Monday. The holidays in Russia will last for 10 days, through Jan. 9.

Earlier this month, Moscow submitted draft security documents demanding that NATO deny membership to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries and roll back the alliance's military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe. Washington and its allies have refused to provide such pledges, but said they are ready for the talks.

The demands, contained in a proposed Russia-U.S. security treaty and a secu-

rity agreement between Moscow and NATO, were drafted amid soaring tensions over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine that has stoked fears of a possible invasion. Russia has denied it has plans to attack its neighbor but pressed for legal guarantees that would rule out NATO expansion and weapons deployment there. Lavrov said last week that, in addition to talks with the U.S., Moscow will start separate talks with NATO on the issue, as well as separate negotiations under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It is important that "our proposals aren't wound up in

endless discussions, which the West is famous for and which it knows how to do, that there is a result of all these diplomatic efforts," Lavrov said Monday. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has decided to convene a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council on Jan. 12, a NATO official said Saturday, adding that the bloc was in touch with Russia about the meeting. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Monday confirmed the meeting will take place, calling talks with NATO "important," but said the details of the meeting are "in the works" and the date is still to be confirmed. □

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Myanmar court postpones verdicts in 2nd case against Suu Kyi

By **TASSANEE VEJPONGSA**
Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A court in military-ruled Myanmar postponed its verdicts Monday on two charges against ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi in which she is accused of importing and possessing walkie-talkies without following official procedures, a legal official familiar with the case said. The case in the court in the capital, Naypyitaw, is among many brought against the 76-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate since the army seized power on Feb. 1, ousting her elected government and arresting top members of her National League for Democracy party.

The court gave no reason for delaying the verdicts until Jan. 10, according to the legal official, who insisted on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities, who have restricted the release of information about Suu Kyi's trials.

Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory in last year's general election, but the military said there was widespread electoral fraud, an assertion that independent poll watchers doubt.

Suu Kyi's supporters and independent analysts say all the charges against her are politically motivated and an attempt to discredit her and legitimize the military's seizure of power while keeping her from returning to politics. If found guilty of all the charges she faces, she could be sentenced to more than 100 years in prison.

Suu Kyi was convicted on Dec. 6 on two other

charges — incitement and breaching COVID-19 restrictions — and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Hours after the sentence was issued, the head of the military-installed government, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, reduced it by half. She is being held by the military at an unknown location and state television reported that she would serve her sentence there. Suu Kyi has been attending court hearings in prison clothes — a white top and a brown longyi skirt provided by the authorities. The hearings are closed to the media and spectators and the prosecutors do not comment. Her lawyers, who had been a source of information on the proceedings, were served with gag orders in October.

A charge under the Export-Import Law of having improperly imported the walkies-talkies was the first filed against Suu Kyi and served as the initial justification for her continued detention. A second charge of illegally possessing the radios was filed the following month.

The radios were seized from the gate of her residence and the barracks of her bodyguards during a search on Feb. 1, the day she was arrested.

Suu Kyi's lawyers argued that the radios were not in her personal possession and were legitimately used to help provide for her security, but the court declined to dismiss the charges.

The court on Monday also heard video testimony from the vice chairman of Suu Kyi's party, Zaw Myint

Maung, in another case against her involving alleged violation of COVID-19 restrictions during last year's election campaign, the legal official said.

Zaw Myint Maung, who had been unable to appear in court earlier for health reasons, testified that people had gathered to see her when she visited Shwe Kyar Pin Ward during the campaign because they respect her, and it wasn't a violation of virus restrictions, the official said.

The offense falls under the Natural Disaster Management Law and the maximum penalty is three years in prison and a fine.

She is also being tried in the same court on five counts of corruption. The maximum penalty for each count is 15 years in prison and a fine. A sixth corruption charge, in which Suu Kyi and ousted President Win Myint are accused of granting permits to rent and buy a helicopter, has not yet gone to trial.

In separate proceedings, she is accused of violating the Official Secrets Act, which carries a maximum term of 14 years.

Additional charges were also added by Myanmar's election commission against Suu Kyi and 15 other politicians in November for alleged fraud in last year's election. The charges by the military-controlled Union Election Commission could result in Suu Kyi's party being dissolved and unable to participate in a new election the military has promised will take place within two years of its takeover. □



Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi leaves the International Court of Justice after the first day of three days of hearings in The Hague, Netherlands on Dec. 10, 2019.

Associated Press

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LOCAL



A must see landmark: The Red Anchor

SAN NICOLAS - At the south east coast of the island, standing alone on a windswept and barren land stands a popular Aruba landmark – a large anchor. It overlooks the sea just beyond, watching over the shipping lanes. It stands there in memory and in honor of all seamen who have lost their life at sea.

The anchor is a “must see” landmark when you visit Aruba. It is among the most photographed historical landmarks for the island. You want to make sure you add this stop on your itinerary when you are visiting the south coast of Aruba. The bright red anchor against the backdrop of the deep blue Caribbean sea and the azure blue skies, make a great backdrop for your vacation pictures.

The anchor is located at the entrance to Gate 6 to the former Lago Colony. It is on the outskirts of Seroe Colorado, on the south east point of the island at the “T” junction to Baby Beach. Depending on where you are staying on the island, follow the signs that indicate the way to Baby Beach. Once you reach the T-junction, it will be right in front of you.

About the Anchor

It will be hard to miss the anchor, it's huge! The anchor that weighs 21,772 kilos, is approximately 10 feet 6 inches wide and 15 feet, 6 inches tall. On the anchor there are some numbers. The 4112 and 4115, which are believed to be the serial numbers that refer to the “fluke” or horizontal and vertical parts of the anchor, re-

spectively. The number 21772K refers to the weight of the anchor in kilos.

This type of anchor was manufactured by Hoesch Dortmund Horde, at a foundry located in Germany.

Where did the Anchor Come From?

There are a number of stories as to the origins of the anchor, which one do you think it was? (Unfortunately the mystery has never been solved, so your imagination can pick which one you think it might be!)

Story 1:

“According to Mr. Manuel M. Curiel, an ex-Lago Tug Captain, a fully laden VLCC (Very Large Crude Carrier) was seeking a mooring at the 15-mile anchorage, known as Bara, on the southern part of the island. This is the usual shal-



low mooring location for ships awaiting orders, etc. The weather was rough with strong current. The normal procedure is that they would walk out three shackles (about 90 feet) until the anchor touches the bottom while the chain must rest on the bottom. Subsequently, they will walk out some extra shackles and when the ship starts to swing or lean on one side, the anchor is properly set. Because of the rough weather, unfortunately they did not get the time to walk out the extra tackles and because of the tension exerted on the winch, it broke, and they lost the anchor and its chain.”

Story 2:

“Mr. Curiel also said that at one time a small tanker with a Korean crew, while lifting their anchor also lifted another anchor near the inner harbor. When the ship asked for assistance, he went with his tugboat along with a barge, to help. But eventually they had to cut the chain and let the anchor go to the bottom because they could not untangle them.”

How Did The Anchor Become a Landmark?

Sometime between 1980 and 1985, three gentlemen (Mr. Wim Martinus – the Harbormaster of Aruba; Mr. August Genser – the ex-Division Superintendent of Lago's Laboratory; and Mr. Willie Davis – Owner of Filtec at Zeewijk in San Nicolas), were having a conversation with Mr. Charlie Brouns Jr. at his famous Charlie's Bar and Restaurant in San Nicolas. Charlie, who was a visionary and had dreams for develop-

ing the San Nicolas area, told these gentlemen that he would like to come up with something innovative for the San Nicolas area to draw tourism to the area.

The “anchor”, which at that time was being stored at the Oranjestad harbor, was suggested as an option. Charlie liked the idea! He then contacted the President of Lago for permission to acquire the anchor. He was granted permission and the anchor was then relocated to its present location and dedicated “To All Seamen” on the occasion of the closing of the Lago Oil Refinery on March 31, 1985.

Through the years the Anchor was slowly weathering from the wind and salt. As time passed, sadly the origin and purpose of the anchor slowly faded away from people's memories.

After Charlie Brouns Jr died on September 15, 2004, his friend Mr. Sam Speziale, requested assistance from the management of Valero Aruba Refinery to help maintain the monument. The Valero Aruba Refinery, graciously sandblasted and painted the anchor and poured a concrete pad around it. On April 17, 2005, the anchor monument was rededicated “To All Seamen” in a formal ceremony in memory of Charlie Brouns Jr.

Today, the anchor stands both as memorial to all seaman who have lost their lives at sea, but also as a silent reminder that Seroe Colorado is part of San Nicolas and that San Nicolas is still a vibrant and important part of the island of Aruba. □



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Article by Etnia Nativa

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Alto Vista history

Episode CXXXVI - 136

In the 18th century most of the inhabitants of Aruba were indigenous who lived on the north coast, one of the largest communities lived in Alto Vista. As they were very religious, they had a person a chief with the name of Antonio Silvester who guided them in the Christian life and it was who decided to build a stone chapel with a roof of corn rods, which would serve as a place of prayer, which in 1750 was blessed by Father Algamesi who came from Coro-Venezuela and appointed Domingo Antonio Silvester as the island's first prosecutor in the name of the Spanish crown and Rome. In 1752 the prosecution passed into the hands of Antonio Silvester's son-in-law, Miguel Álvarez, who continued to guide the parishioners in their prayers.

At the end of the eighteen century many inhabitants the island died as a result of the black fever epidemic and since people believed that the Alto Vista area was the most infected, they began to build their homes further south within the Noord area, so the town of Noord began to grow into a community till getting its own Church. However religious festivals continued to be celebrated at this sacred native place, with the custom of arriving in procession to Alto Vista.

Meanwhile the seat of government of Aruba changed from Commanders Bay in Savaneta to Paardenbaai (Horse Bay) thus creating a great center of activities in, Playa-Oranjestad, so it happened that interest in Alto Vista and its chapel was lost due to the distance. In 1816 Pastor Pirovano prohibited the use of the Alto Vis-



ta Chapel the year in which the place was officially banned, in this way the precarious construction deteriorated, although by habit natives continued visiting the place in small groups considering the site as the cradle of spirituality in Aruba. Silvester and Álvarez were the first two prosecutors buried in the Alto Vista Chapel yard.

In 1944 Maria Francisca Pietersz-Lacle, with the help of "Wadji" Tromp, gathered 2,000 guilders on one Sunday for this purpose. They went to request authorization from Monsignor Zepenveld who was in Curacao but he denied the authorization in two different visit-

ing occasion, however they continued to raise funds for the construction and for the third time they visited Monsignor Zeppenveld in Curacao who finally authorized them and promised that he will come to his native island for the blessing of the chapel. □

Did you say that you love Aruba its origins and cultural heritage? Than this private encounter with our columnist anthropologist is just as you. Sessions created in a gorgeous setting for visitor with special interests. Appointment is required. etnianativa03@gmail.com or Whatsapp us 297 592 2702 for a private reservation.



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How it all began

It was 1938 when Mr. Eric Ponson started his journey at General Store. Ponson did not hesitate and decided to buy General Store. Buying a store and thus going from employee to owner of a business with a debt of 11.000 guilders was not an easy task.

As the saying goes: "Behind every successful man, is a strong woman". In the case of Ponson, this was no different. As General Store progressed and slowly became successful, Mrs. Irene Ponson, came in to assist her husband. Irene Ponson is a visionary, she knew exactly where and how to invest and within a short amount of time in 1970, General Store moved to a better location at the Steenweg. This allowed for a lot more merchandize, products and employees. Supply and demand was as such, that General Store became the number 1 electrical business. The place where you went to find bulbs, cables, outlets or any other electrical equipment you needed. Business kept going so well that the location at the Steenweg became too small and was moved later to Dakota Shopping Paradise and lat-

er to Pedro Gallego Straat. With this move, an expansion was decided upon and an electronics store in Savaneta was opened. General Store still being very successful was ready for more growth.

Ricky, Kenneth, Corine and Frans are the fruits of this marriage. They worked at their parent's side every day until they were ready to go abroad to study. In was in their backyard that all containers were stalled. This is why all four children know everything there is to know about the business. Kenneth and Frans however, decided to further develop their father's legacy and continued with their mother's dream to expand the business. An expansion not in square feet only, but in merchandize as well. A great opportunity presented itself when the Ponson family was able to buy a piece of property across from the airport. In 2007 the Ponson family moved into their brand new and huge building. Ponson's General Store now had an electrical department, as housewares department, a paint department and a hardware department.

After a successful opening and expansion, Kenneth and Frans who inherited their mothers vision, decided General Store was ready for yet another expansion. Together with investors a visibility report was drafted, which resulted in Noord being a very good location for another store. The search for a well located property commenced. Soon after the purchase,



with the support of Mr. Tom Barfell and management of Do it Best in the States, the construction of Do it Center commenced. Mrs. Claudia Ponson, Kenneth his wife, was the mastermind behind the interior decoration, making sure the interior of the store was according the Do it Best guidelines.

Fast forward to today. A Do it Center in Aruba, with more than 50.000 top of the line items for interior as well exterior use, building materials, STO products and a top of the line grocery store. Perseverance, responsibility, vision and the courage to invest have made Ponson's General Store as successful as it is today.

Super Do It Center Shaba & Groceries

Located in Shaba, Noord. This is the last sibling of the Do It Center family. Here you will be able to find anything you are looking for. The building is divided into several departments from home to hardware to groceries. Everything under one roof.

Groceries? Visit the fully stocked supermarket with fresh fruits and vegetables and high class meat selections. Highly known products and brands are here for you to grab. Every week

Do It Center Groceries offers you great discount on selected items. Weekly specials are very popular and a perfect chance for you to buy your favorite products at a reduced price.

Need a home makeover? Do not skip the furniture department "Leenbakker". Here, you will find a divine collection of European furniture, worldwide known for their modern and stylish features for your bedroom, bathroom, living room or kitchen. For your garden they have a wide selection of durable furniture specially made for our tropical climate. Take a walk around and find some treasures. Find the perfect accessory for your house, fitted for your personality and style. Modern, elegant, retro industrial, whatever your style is you will definitely find something for your personal taste.

Feeling hungry? Take a break and relax at the 'Deli'. Savor a delicious lunch or a sandwich with a cup of coffee or perhaps a wrap. If you are a sweet tooth you will not be able to just skip the great variety of desserts they have. So tempting!

Do it Center Shaba is open from Mon to Sat from 8AM to 8PM and closed on Sunday

Do It Center Camacuri

Do it Center Camacuri as mentioned before was the first official building of the Do It Center family. After serving the community for many years as a multipurpose facility this was recently transformed to a department specially designated for contractors services only. Open from Mon to Fri from 7.30AM to 6PM. On Sat from 7.30AM- 4PM and closed on Sunday.

Do It Center Savaneta

This location is the baby of the family. Here you will also be able to find everything for your home and garden and building materials to build or renovate your home. Just drive into the 'Lumber Drive-Thru' and the experts will help you with everything you need. Open from Mon to Fri from 8AM to 6PM, SAT, 10AM-4PM and closed on Sunday.

For more information go to www.doit.aw ☐

Do it Center



After shaking up Exxon's board, Engine No. 1 widens sights

By STAN CHOE
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Few had heard of Engine No. 1 until it shocked corporate America this year by pushing Exxon Mobil to revamp its board of directors, in part to focus more on clean energy. Now it's bringing its active-ownership approach to the world of stock index funds, which sit at the heart of most investors' retirement accounts.

Yasmin Dahya Bilger is head of exchange-traded funds at Engine No. 1, whose ETF began trading in June under the ticker symbol "VOTE." It owns 500 of the largest U.S. stocks, from Apple to Zillow, and says it will hold them accountable by engaging with their executives and voting at shareholder meetings.

Many stock funds say they do the same thing, of course, and some charge even lower fees than Engine No. 1's. Bilger talked about how her fund is different and how more investors are choosing to take environmental, social and governance issues into account in hopes of the best long-term returns. This conversation has been edited for length and for clarity.

Q: Is Exxon the template for what Engine No. 1 will try to do with other companies? Shake up the board to get change going?

A: With the Exxon campaign, people like to call us activists. We like to call ourselves active owners.

There's a wide toolkit to engage with companies. One is activism, and frankly we hope to use that tool the least. What we're focusing on now is more collaborative engagements, working with managements to work toward key environmental and other decisions to drive shareholder value.

Q: And you're trying to do that with all 500 companies in the ETF?

A: We're trying to focus on several key themes that we think are important and a small set of companies where we think can move the needle.

We think that there is a great long-term sharehold-



This undated photo provided by Engine No. 1 LP shows, Yasmin Dahya Bilger, head of ETFs at Engine No. 1.

Associated Press

er value case to make for key environmental and social issues. What that means is we're only going to be engaged in places where we think we can make that strong deep economic argument.

Q: Can you give an example?

A: We're working very closely with the management of General Motors on their long-term goal to electrify their auto fleet. We're hoping to help them champion what their strategy is and really give them the language they can use with their stakeholders, including their shareholders, to continue with that plan.

Q: Should investors expect to see change as big and as quickly as it came about with Exxon?

A: Markets are so short-term in nature. This is a long-term view. Many of these things — like a focus on the environment, net-zero targets or diversity in the workforce — they work with shareholder value. But it's about that long-term view. A lot

of what we're doing has a long cycle towards it.

Q: You want the ETF's investors to be excited about how their votes are cast at annual shareholder meetings. What if one believes nuclear power is helpful for the environment, while another hates it? Do they get a say?

A: There's a lot happening in this space about how to engage best with shareholders and get their feedback. A lot of startups are trying to tap into that energy and feedback. Realistically, we certainly want to have a pulse on our investors. What we want to focus on is transparency.

Most shareholders don't even know that as shareholders, they have a vote, and they have a voice. And they also don't know how their votes are being cast. A person who invests in our fund will understand the stance we're taking on a certain topic.

From an end investor's point of view, (reports detailing how funds at annual

meetings) come out in very long shareholder reports at the end of the year. A drive toward real-time disclosure is really important and something we want to be the tip of the spear on.

Q: Because the ETF tracks an index, its performance shouldn't differ much from the broad market's. How should investors be scoring you at home?

A: This space, the ESG space, is very inaccessible to the average investor, and it's because we speak in jargon and create big yearly reports that nobody can read and comprehend.

What's really important is the storytelling aspect of what's actually being done. One of the most important things for me is how we're communicating that to investors.

Q: Should we expect your fund to vote very differently than the big index funds at shareholder meetings?

A: Historically what you've seen from large passive providers is they tended to

vote against environmental shareholder proposals. Now that's changing. This year, there's been a demonstrable increase in support for a lot of these proposals, particularly on climate. But I think there's a long way to go.

We hope to be the tip of the spear on this topic, bringing these issues to light to the mainstream. Only recently has this concept of shareholder voting gotten the spotlight put on it.

Q: The stereotype of ESG investors is that they're younger, they're women, they're more diverse. Is that the case?

A: ESG may have historically stayed in certain corners. That's because a lot of the conversation was on the ideology or morality of ESG investing.

What you're seeing more recently is we're making a really strong shareholder value argument for investing in this space. I think that widens the net to who's actually interested in coming with us and participating. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

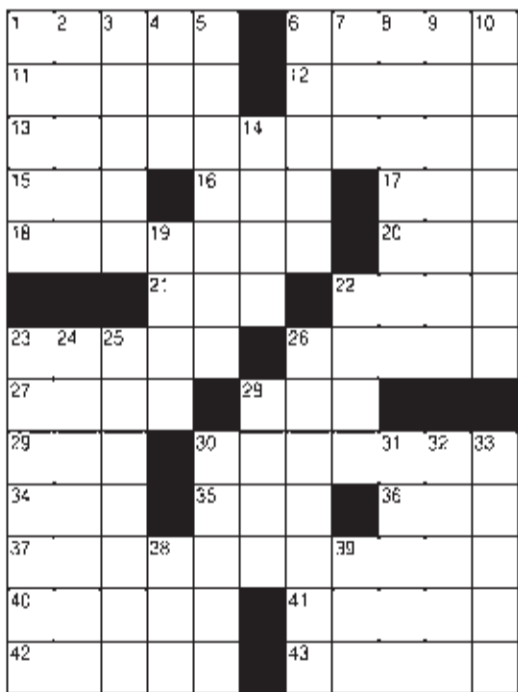
- ACROSS**
- 37 Appear untidy
 - 1 Gerbil homes
 - 40 Sensational
 - 6 Preclude
 - 11 Be of one mind
 - 41 Calls out
 - 12 Cream of the crop
 - 42 Sports figures
 - 43 Carmaker Ford

- DOWN**
- 1 Plane part
 - 15 Form 1040 org.
 - 16 Hawaii's Mauna —
 - 17 Boxing's Muhammad
 - 18 In a spiteful way
 - 20 Signing need
 - 21 Curtain holder
 - 22 Self-referential
 - 23 Turn red, maybe
 - 26 Art inspirers
 - 27 Historic times
 - 28 Stroller user
 - 29 Swindle
 - 30 Prepared to play
 - 34 Plus
 - 35 "... man — mouse?"
 - 36 Much of N. Amer.



Yesterday's answer

- 8 Lummoxes
- 9 Jock
- 10 Eye parts
- 14 Do origami
- 19 "— bien!"
- 22 Remote button
- 23 Brings to mind
- 24 Resolve
- 25 Famed box
- 26 King or queen
- 28 Lawn material
- 30 Marsh croakers
- 31 Became entrenched
- 32 Theater worker
- 33 Singer Cline
- 38 Young fox
- 39 Furning feeling



12-28

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's. X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-28 CRYPTOQUOTE
E H E R Y M J B C R Z J L K M T C L B J V .

F M J U R Q C L M G Z J O T Z J V

G V H Y M T V O T I T M G L N J J V

R V J . — O B R Q K M R E G B S
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO TIME DON'T THINK. THE MORE YOU THINK, THE MORE TIME YOU HAVE. — HENRY FORD

Tesla to halt games on infotainment screens in moving cars

By TOM KRISHER
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Under pressure from U.S. auto safety regulators, Tesla has agreed to stop allowing video games to be played on center touch screens while its vehicles are moving.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says the company will send out a software update over the Internet so the function called "Passenger Play" will be locked and won't work while vehicles are in motion.

The move comes one day after the agency announced it would open a formal investigation into distracted driving concerns about Tesla's video games, some of which could be played while cars are being driven.

An agency spokeswoman says in a statement Thursday that the change came after regulators discussed concerns about the system with Tesla. The first update went out Wednesday as part of Tesla's holiday software release, and the rest of the vehicles should get it today.



Vince Patton, a new Tesla owner, demonstrates on Dec. 8, 2021, on a closed course in Portland, Ore., how he can play video games on the vehicle's console while driving.

Associated Press

The statement says NHTSA regularly talks about infotainment screens with all automakers. A message was left Thursday seeking comment from Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations department.

The agency says its investigation of Tesla's feature will continue even with the update. It was not clear whether NHTSA would require Tesla to do a formal recall with the update. In the past the agency has asked Tesla why it should not be required to do recalls with safety-related software updates.

"The Vehicle Safety Act prohibits manufacturers from selling vehicles with defects posing unreasonable risks to safety, including technologies that distract drivers from driving safely," NHTSA's statement said. The agency said it assesses how manufacturers

identify and guard against distraction hazards due to misuse or intended use of screens and other convenience technology.

The agency announced Wednesday that it would formally investigate Tesla's screens after an owner from the Portland, Oregon, area filed a complaint when he discovered that a driver could play games while the cars are moving. The agency said that the "Passenger Play" feature could distract the driver and increase the risk of a crash. The probe covers about 580,000 Tesla Models S, X, Y and 3 from the 2017 through 2022 model years. In documents detailing the investigation, NHTSA said "Passenger Play" has been available since December 2020. Before that, enabling gameplay was only possible when its vehicles were in park. □

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Outlets hurt by dwindling public interest in news in 2021

By DAVID BAUDER
AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The presidential election, pandemic and racial reckoning were stories that drove intense interest and engagement to news outlets in 2020. To a large degree, 2021 represented the inevitable hangover.

Various metrics illustrate the dwindling popularity of news content.

Cable news networks were the main form of evening entertainment for millions of Americans last year. In 2021, weekday prime-time viewership dropped 38% at CNN, 34% at Fox News Channel and 25% at MSNBC, according to the Nielsen company.

The decline was less steep but still significant at broadcast television evening newscasts: 12% at ABC's "World News Tonight" and the "CBS Evening News;" 14% at NBC's "Nightly News," Nielsen said.

The Trump era saw explosive subscriber growth for some digital news sites like The New York Times and Washington Post. Yet readers aren't spending as much time there; Comscore said the number of unique visitors to the Post's site was down 44% in November compared to November 2020, and down 34% at the Times.

While a Dec. 23 headline on



Exterior images, from left, appear of CNN headquarters on Aug. 26, 2014, in Atlanta, the New York Times building on June 22, 2019, in New York, News Corporation headquarters with Fox News studios on July 31, 2021, in New York and The One Franklin Square Building, home of The Washington Post, on Feb. 8, 2019, in downtown Washington.

the Los Angeles Times front page — "How Much More Can We Take?" — referred to COVID-19, it could easily be applied to the news appetite in general.

For the most part, smart news executives knew the peaks of 2020 were not sustainable. "It was entirely predictable," said news media analyst Ken Doctor. Perhaps that was most obvious at the cable news networks. They built a prime-time model almost entirely focused on political combat during the Trump years, which made it difficult for them to pivot to something different, said Tom Rosenstiel, a journalism professor at the University of Maryland.

"You become, to some extent, a prisoner of the audience you built," Rosenstiel said.

Those networks remain fo-

cused on politics even as viewership interest wanes. The media monitoring company NewsWhip looked at 14 million political articles online last year and found they had an average of 924 engagements, or social media interactions. The 13.5 million articles NewsWhip has traced in 2021 had an average of 321 engagements.

To a certain extent, these outlets have turned elsewhere for revenue opportunities, Doctor said. CNN is preparing to debut a new streaming service early next year, and recently poached Fox News' Chris Wallace to join that effort. Fox News, while doubling down on conservative commentary following perceived threats from outlets like Newsmax and OANN, directed fans to its Fox Nation streaming ser-

vice. Arguably Fox's most attention-getting programming of the year was a documentary on the Jan. 6 Capitol riot by Tucker Carlson, that asserted it was an effort to silence Trump supporters.

Both CNN and MSNBC face key programming decisions in the new year. CNN must replace its most popular host, Chris Cuomo, who was fired after it was revealed how he helped his brother through a political scandal. MSNBC must replace Brian Williams in its lineup and will most likely see its most popular personality, Rachel Maddow, cut back on her hours.

Although usage of the Times' digital site is down, the company passed 8 million subscriptions and is on pace to grow further. Doctor said the Times has done an effective job of diversi-

fying beyond politics, most notably with its Wirecutter service of consumer recommendations.

Leaders at the Post have wrestled with how to deal their readers' dependence on political fare, according to the Wall Street Journal. The company is looking internationally for growth opportunities, Doctor said, a focus that plays to the strength of its new executive editor, Sally Buzbee.

"People to some degree have focused inward," Rosenstiel said. "They're getting the news that they need but it's not as much news as it was a year ago." Particularly for the national news outlets, Rosenstiel said 2021 may best be remembered as a transitional year away from the frenzied news pace of the Trump years.

He sees the effect of those years in the intensity with which the media has covered every twist and turn of legislative negotiations over President Joe Biden's "Build Back Better" bill. Like most work in Congress, it's slow-moving and filled with incremental developments.

He's concerned that concentration on this story has distracted from other priorities, including focusing on local efforts to restrict voting rights, ultimately a more important story. □

Associated Press



Jean-Marc Vallée arrives at the 29th American Cinematheque Awards honoring Reese Witherspoon at the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza on Oct. 30, 2015, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

By RYAN PEARSON
AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Director and producer Jean-

Marc Vallée, who won an Emmy for directing the hit HBO series "Big Little Lies" and whose 2013 dra-

'Dallas Buyers Club' director Jean-Marc Vallée dead at 58

ma "Dallas Buyers Club" earned multiple Oscar nominations, has died. He was 58.

His representative Bumble Ward said Sunday that Vallée died suddenly in his cabin outside Quebec City, Canada, over the weekend.

Vallée was acclaimed for his naturalistic approach to filmmaking, directing stars including Reese Witherspoon, Nicole Kidman, Amy Adams and Jake Gyllenhaal over the past decade.

He directed Emily Blunt in 2009's "The Young Vic-

toria" and became a sought-after name in Hollywood after "Dallas Buyers Club," featuring Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto, earned six Academy Awards nominations, including best picture.

He often shot with natural light and hand-held cameras and gave actors freedom to improvise the script and move around within a scene's location.

The crew roamed up and down the Pacific Coast Trail to shoot Witherspoon in 2014's "Wild."

"They can move anywhere they want," the Canadian

filmmaker said of his actors in a 2014 interview with The Associated Press.

"It's giving the importance to storytelling, emotion, characters. I try not to interfere too much. I don't need to cut performances. Often, the cinematographer and I were like, 'This location sucks. It's not very nice. But, hey, that's life.'"

He re-teamed with Witherspoon to direct the first season of "Big Little Lies" in 2017, and directed Adams in 2018's "Sharp Objects," also for HBO.

Vallée won DGA awards for both. □



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Analysis: COVID-19 means teams battle 2 opponents weekly

By **ROB MAADDI**
AP Pro Football Writer

Josh Johnson joined the Ravens 10 days ago, and the well-traveled quarterback started his first game in 1,092 days with first place in the AFC North on the line Sunday at Cincinnati.

The Chargers didn't have outside linebacker Joey Bosa, running back Austin Ekeler, receiver Mike Williams and center Corey Linsley when they faced the Texans. The Vikings were missing running back Dalvin Cook for their matchup against the Rams. Blame COVID-19.

Several other teams also were missing key players on the reserve/COVID-19 list. As the NFL's regular season winds down, expect more teams to play important games without some of their starters because players continue to test positive despite the league's revised protocols requiring less testing.

Baltimore, already missing

2019 NFL MVP Lamar Jackson and 10 other players due to injuries, lost backup quarterback Tyler Huntley and four others to the COVID-19 list, forcing Johnson to start against the Bengals. The Ravens had no chance, even though Johnson was 28 of 40 for 304 yards with two touchdowns and one interception. They lost 41-21 to the Bengals and fell to 8-7, decreasing their play-off odds.

"It's just challenging circumstances all the way around," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "I thought our guys fought hard and did the best they could under the circumstances.

That's what you ask for. ... You want to be full strength. You always strive to be full strength with what you have, but that isn't how the world works. That's not the world we live in all the time. So, I'm sure that they're full strength, and that's good for them.

But we're not, and that's just

temporary. So, we'll keep fighting and see what we can do next week."

The Chargers had more than a dozen players sidelined due to COVID-19, while lowly Houston was missing 16 players, including top receiver Brandin Cooks, center Justin Britt, defensive end Jonathan Greenard and kicker Ka'imi Fairbairn. Somehow, the Texans rolled to a 41-29 win, damaging Los Angeles' playoff hopes. The inconsistent Chargers (8-7) are tied with Baltimore and Las Vegas (8-7).

Without Cook, the Vikings struggled inside the red zone in a 30-23 loss to the Rams.

The loss dropped Minnesota (7-8) out of a playoff spot, and the Vikings will need help, plus wins, to get in.

Other teams overcame their COVID-19 losses to earn victories Sunday.

The Chiefs had no trouble routing Pittsburgh 35-10 de-



Baltimore Ravens quarterback Josh Johnson throws before an NFL football game against the Cincinnati Bengals, Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021, in Cincinnati.

Associated Press

spite playing without Travis Kelce, kicker Harrison Butker and punter Tommy Townsend.

The Bills beat the Patriots on the road to move into first place in the AFC East without receivers Cole Beasley and Gabriel Davis, starting right guard Jon Feliciano and two assistant coaches. The Jets had 20 players on the COVID-19 list and played without coach Rob-

ert Saleh, but they defeated Jacksonville in a game for draft positioning.

Eagles coach Nick Sirianni tested positive Wednesday morning, hours after a win over Washington on Tuesday night. But he cleared protocols Saturday and was on the sideline for Philadelphia's 34-10 win over New York that vaulted the Eagles (8-7) into the No. 7 seed in the NFC. □



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Blueprint: Can 'Bama's success help Michigan vs. Georgia?

By **RALPH D. RUSSO**
AP College Football Writer
FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP)

— Georgia's defense was nearly invincible for three months, allowing less than a touchdown per game. Then came the Southeastern Conference championship game against Alabama, where the Crimson Tide seemingly cracked the code on the Bulldogs' stingy D in a 41-24 victory. As No. 2 Michigan prepares to face No. 3 Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinal at the Orange Bowl on Friday night, how much of Alabama's plan can be replicated by the Wolverines?

"It's hard to say blueprint because if it only happens one game in a year it obviously didn't work too well for too many other people," Michigan offensive coordinator Josh Gattis said Monday. "But you know, it does give you a little bit of confidence." Good teams have bad games, but Geor-

gia's defensive meltdown against Alabama was a special kind of outlier.

Since 2000, only four teams have held their opponents below 10 points per game for an entire season: Alabama in 2011 (8.15); USC in 2008 (9.0); Miami in 2001 (9.36); and TCU in 2000 (9.64). Georgia has a chance to become the fifth, entering the playoff having allowed 9.5 points per game. None of those previous four teams allowed more than 27 points in a regular-season game. The 41 points Georgia allowed to the Crimson Tide represents a third of the Bulldogs' season total of 124.

Going back to 2009, no defense that has led the nation in yards per play — which Georgia currently does at 4.01 — has had a worse single game than the 7.66 ypp the Bulldogs allowed to Alabama.

Only Texas in 2009 (7.29 against Texas A&M) and

Alabama in 2011 (7.41 to Georgia Southern) have led the country in yards per play allowed and had a game in which they permitted more than 7.0 yards per play. Georgia defensive coordinator Dan Lanning, who is working two jobs these days as he prepares to take over as Oregon head coach, said one poor performance didn't send the Bulldogs scrambling back to the drawing board. "I think you have to approach it like any game that we have had this season where you go back and you try to be analytical, regardless of the result," Lanning said. "We take a deep dive every single game when we're successful, we take a deep dive when we're not."

The Bulldogs weren't about to share any schematic tweaks they may have made over the past month to shore up a defense that generated no sacks and allowed Alabama receivers

to run free.

Mostly, the Bulldogs talked about getting back to basics: Tracking the ball in the air, tackling in space, getting multiple defenders to a ball carrier and communicating. "It's just the little things that make a big difference when it comes to the games. A lot of people might not think so, but we think so and that's why we're really focused on that," Bulldogs safety Lewis Cine said.

Lanning said Michigan's offense stresses a defense's discipline with misdirection, motion and some gadgetry. The Wolverines are run heavy, but still have more plays of 50-plus yards (17) than any team in major college football this season.

"There's multiple plays they use to set up the next play, whether it be play-action runs to set up play-action shots down the field; whether it be their misdirection game, with reverses, flea-flickers," Lanning said. "They

do a great job utilizing trick plays to get the ball down extended down the field, as well as those shots."

ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit, who will call the Orange Bowl, said the Alabama game wasn't so much about what the Crimson Tide ran but who was running it. Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young (421 yards passing) and receiver Jameson Williams (seven catches for 184 yards and two TDs) took apart a Georgia secondary that had not been similarly challenged all season.

"But I don't think Michigan has an offense that necessarily can just draw up a play or a sequence of plays and say, 'OK, we're going to be in a good spot to run the exact same offensive scheme that Alabama did. Hey, Alabama gave us the blueprint, let's just do exactly what 'Bama did,'" Herbstreit said. "Just because that's not their identity." □